

New update in the contract fight

Fiat Chrysler autoworkers demand time to study contract before vote

Joseph Kishore
18 September 2015

Following a press conference earlier this week between United Auto Workers President Dennis Williams and Fiat Chrysler (FCA) CEO Sergio Marchionne, the UAW is moving as quickly as possible to push through the agreement. Union executives are meeting today and over the weekend to approve the deal and plan a strategy aimed at overcoming deep hostility among autoworkers.

Throughout the negotiations, autoworkers have been told nothing about what the union and company are planning. Since the tentative agreement was announced, details have been leaked through the media, with both the UAW and FCA attempting to paint a major attack on workers—including a permanent reduction in base pay and a historic assault on health care benefits—as a significant victory for workers. (See “The UAW-Fiat Chrysler deal: A conspiracy against autoworkers”)

The practice of the UAW has been to present workers with fraudulent “highlights” that cover up the extent of concessions, giving workers only a day or two—sometime less—to consider these “highlights” before a vote.

Workers denounced these schemes. “The UAW needs to give us all copies of the entire agreement weeks before the vote and not just a few pages of the highlights telling us what we will receive and nothing about what they will be taking away from us,” said a Ford worker in Ohio.

A younger tier two worker at Ford’s Sterling Heights, Michigan plant said he was worried that the UAW was going to “throw something at us, sugarcoat it and push whatever they want through.”

One of the methods of the UAW and the companies has been to offer “signing bonuses,” that is, lump sum

payments that do not add to worker base pay. The aim is to exploit the deep economic insecurity of workers, particularly newer workers hired in under the two-tier system, to get a rotten deal passed.

A worker at the GM Lordstown Assembly Plant in Ohio told the WSWs, “I’ve bent over and bent over for this company, and it is always take, take, take. Even the top ones in the [UAW] international are truly in bed with the companies. They toy around, throw dollar signs around to people who are desperate.

“I don’t trust the union officials as far as I can throw them,” she added.

Workers told the WSWs that opposition to the agreement is widespread. One worker who has been at FCA’s Warren Truck plant in Michigan for 20 years said, “The sentiment among workers is that this [deal] is not good at all. We thought we were going to get a lot more. I have a friend at Jefferson [assembly plant in Detroit]. The sentiment there is the same.”

Of the union, he said, “I don’t trust them. I’m sure they will find a way to pass this thing. When I saw the press conference, I was waiting for [UAW President] Williams and [FCA CEO] Marchionne to kiss. And there was my local president smiling in the background.”

The worker said that he would opt out of the union and stop paying dues, but was worried about what impact this would have on his pension and health benefits, particularly now that the UAW is controlling the retiree health care fund and may soon control the health care fund for current workers.

Retirees were shifted to a union-controlled health care fund in 2007, and a major component of the UAW’s current negotiations with the auto companies, including

FCA, is a plan for a similar fund for current workers. An autoworker in Kentucky said, “I haven’t met one retiree who doesn’t feel like they’ve been corn holed. Health insurance is constantly changing. They call to find out what’s going on, and the union just says, ‘Oh well, it changed.’ That’s what is going to happen when we get pooled into a co-op or whatever you want to call it.”

Workers from throughout the country have been signing up for the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter. Many have left comments expressing the overwhelming skepticism and hostility of workers to the UAW.

“Thank you for the valuable info, and for spreading the word of the UAW’s continued exploitation of the people they falsely claim to represent,” wrote a tier two worker at Ford’s Flat Rock Assembly Plant outside of Detroit. “I can honestly say that my colleagues and I are being subjected to the same propaganda and worsening work conditions as our FCA brothers and sisters.

“The UAW has become a third rate pyramid scheme with no concerns for our well being. We should all have went on strike September 14th [when the contract expired]; it is always better to bargain from a position of power, but to each Marchionne and Williams smoochin’ each other up, I knew what I had predicted had come true.”

“The UAW is now it’s own company and no longer fighting for us, but now fighting to screw auto workers,” wrote one worker from Ford’s Louisville Assembly Plant in Kentucky.

The WSWS urges workers to form rank-and-file committees independent of the UAW to organize opposition. The committees would work to establish lines of communication between plants, between Ford, FCA and GM workers, and between auto workers and other workers throughout the country and internationally.

These committees should reject the efforts by the UAW to divide workers, pit them against each other, and blackmail or threaten them to push through a pro-company deal. Workers should insist on the right to study the contract and all relevant documents for several weeks before a vote, with meetings set up independently from the union to review and discuss the details of the agreement.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact